

THE MUSIC OF KASHMIR

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In music, dance and drama Kashmir, too, has its traditions. Historical facts reveal that from the 10th to the 11th century, music in Kashmir enjoyed royal patronage. Khem Indra a popular poet of the 11th century records that Kashmir possessed its own theatre. In Kalhana's *Rajtarangini*, which is a chronicle of the Kings of Kashmir over a period of about 2000 years and the most authentic document of the culture of Kashmir, mention is made of Maharaja Jalok (200 B.C.). He is known for the patronage he extended to music and to hundreds of musicians at his court. Maharaja Lalitadita, who came a thousand years later, is also reported to have shared this enthusiasm for music. Indra Prabha, the most celebrated woman dancer of ancient times was in his court. Other Hindu ruling princes like Harshdev also continued their patronage to music. Not only that, they were themselves talented musicians.

Fresh Influences

During the Muslim era the music of Kashmir did not only thrive, but imbibed some influences from Iran, Arabia, Samarkand and Tashkand. It is in this period that *muqams* (i.e. *ragas*) like *Araq*, *Baya*, *Isphahan*, *Segah*, *Charargah*, *Shah-Naz*, *Kohi* and *Ras-i-Fars* were introduced in the music of Kashmir. Some of the patterns of rhythm like *Neemdoor* and *Turki Zarb* were also introduced during this period.

Every year, in the reign of Sultan Zain-ul-Abdin, a grand music conference was held in spring at Bijbehara which is about 30 miles to the south of Srinagar. This was invariably attended by eminent musicians from Iran, Iraq, Arabia and India (Deccan). Sultan Zain-ul-Abdin was a great classical singer himself and at one of these conferences, an outside musician

presented him with *Sangeet Chandamini*, which is one of the most authentic treatises on music.

Sultan Hassan Shah who came soon after him did a great service to the music of Kashmir. He had as many as 1022 musicians at his court; for the first time, books on music were written. Unfortunately none of these treatises are available now. It is also said that he once invited six Karnatak musicians to popularise some of the Karnatak *ragas* in Kashmir.

During the Chak Dynasty rule over Kashmir, Yusuf Shah Chak (1576) is famous for having shown a keen interest and enthusiasm for Kashmiri music. His wife, Habba Khatoon, the renowned poetess-musician, queen and mystic, definitely added a fresh note in the tone of Kashmiri classical music i.e. *Soofiana Kalam*.

With the downfall of the Chak dynasty, the music of Kashmir lost its royal patronage and it received an obvious set-back. But musicians and talented artistes like Soom Bhat, Shridhar Bhat, Mulla Ahmad, Abdul Qadir, Mulla Jamil, Bahlol, Arnimal (wife of the great Kashmiri Persian poet, Bhawani Das Kachru), Ayodya Bhat, Abdulla Shah and his contemporary Khala Saib, Hait Saib, Pher-Bhat Munshi and Rahim Shah are known for their extraordinary work and talent in music. When Kashmir lost its freedom, its music was kept alive by the genius and interest of individuals. It withstood the storm of tyranny and barbarism. It lighted the hearts of people through centuries of darkness and oppression.

Trends of Today

With the coming of freedom the art and culture of Kashmir is coming into its own. The revival of its music is phenomenal. The music of Kashmir, as we find it today, is thus the result of a curious admixture of many an influence under different rules. Because in music, too Kashmir had to assimilate various foreign characteristics it has lost, in this process, some of its intricate and subtle classical details. Unfortunately, for want of an exact notation, which Indian classical music also does not yet possess, the music of Kashmir could not be written. Nor are there any authentic works giving a comprehensive background of the music of Kashmir. Most of the manuscripts that may be traced, are at best, a collection of the poetry sung to this music. The music of Kashmir has, therefore, been handed down from person to person. This too has made our music suffer. But some of its broad details and original characteristics are still retained which have tempted a study.

Classical and Folk

Soofiana Kalam is the classical music of Kashmir while the main forms of folk music are *Chhakkri*, *Bacha Naghma*, *Band Jashna* (*Wathore* type),

Tambur Nagma (*Rabab* Chorus) *Ruff*, *Wanwun* and *Changa* display. *Chhakkri*, however, is the most popular of them all.

Soofiana Kalam possesses some unique elements. This form of music, is not only grammatical, both in its patterns of rhythms and the combination of notes, but contains a rich literature, with deep thought content, of Persian and Kashmiri poetry. The melodies, *muqams* as they are called, were sung to the accompaniment of a dance known as the *Hafiz Nagma*. This dance, was, till very recently performed by a female dancer — the *Hafiz* — who added a further ornamentation to the *Soofiana* music. This dancing part ultimately fell into the hands of professionals and is now completely out of vogue. The names of dancers, like Noon Kain, Babi Chat are still famous. The *Hafiz* dressed themselves in *ghagra* attire but their head-gear was different. It consisted of a profusely bedecked *taich* (a brocade cap) with ornaments generally of gold and over it a *chunni* hung loosely.

It seems that this was not the original dress used by the dancers. The author has come across pen-pictures of a 'nautch' girl which shows that the *Hafiz* used the traditional *pheran*-and-*shilwar*-dress with typical embroidery over it and no *chunni* was used. Probably the *ghagra* came with the Pathan Rule over Kashmir. Later this dress minus the head-gear was adopted in the *Bacha Nagma* of folk music. This is prevalent even at present.

Like the Indian Classical music *Soofiana Kalam* has a complete circle of *muqams* (classical tunes) which have to be sung at certain parts of the day and cover the 24 hours in 54 main *muqams*. The names of some of the *muqams* are the same as the Indian *ragas*, i.e. *Bhairvi*, *Jhanjoi*, *Kanara*, *Lalit*, *Bihar*, *Khamach*, *Kalyan* and the like. Other *muqams* have Persian names i.e. *Isbhan*, *Dogah*, *Panjgah*, etc. The origin of most of these *muqams* is attributed to the sounds of the birds and so on. *Kalyan* for instance is based on the voice of the dove, *Surath* on that of the kite. *Khamach* is similarly based on the voice of the parrot, *Lalit* on that of the crow and *Dev Gandhar* is based on that sound which is produced by a boat gliding over calm waters.

In its *talas*, Kashmiri music has its owned metres and the *bols* of the *talas* are different from Indian music. Prevalent among them are *Duyeka*, *Sehtal*, *Neemdor*, *Neemsageel*, *Ravani*, *Kukhamas*, *Chapandaz*, *Duroya*, *Yeka*, *Hajas*, *Door-i-Khafeef* and *Turki Zarb*. All these *talas* have their own nomenclature and are read as *dhish*, *taka*, *toon* and so on.

Unlike Indian Classical Music *Soofiana Kalam* is sung in chorus and usually a brief *Lahara* known as the *Shakal* precedes the *muqam*. This is, in a way the *alap* of the *muqam*. Each melody is divided into two parts, the *asthaee* and the *antara*. The *asthaee* is called the *zamin* and the *antara*

is known as the *bah*. In style it resembles the *Dhrupad Gayakee* and the characteristic of *tan*, *murki*, *zamzama* and the like cannot possibly find scope in this form of music as the real stress lies on the set of songs to be sung in each *muqam*.

Soofiana Kalam, though broadly based on Indian music has thus a separate entity and a history of its own. Recently when I asked one of the greatest living musicians the age of this music of Kashmir, he said it was as old as Kashmir itself.

Typical Instruments

Instruments used in this music have also a pattern of their own. Usually, the *santoor*, rightly termed as the "*Veena of Kashmir*", the *sehtar*, a miniature Indian *sitar* with frets made of thick thread, the *saz*, also known as the *Saz-i-Kashmir* and the *tabla (dukra)* as it is called, forms its orchestra, *santoor* being the most important of all. In it, strings of $1\frac{1}{2}$ octave are stretched over a rectangular hollow wooden box and it is played with two delicate curved hockey-shaped sticks known as the *qualams*.

Among the forms of folk music *Chhakkri* is the most popular and may be termed as the craze of the country.

Besides the placid lakeside, under the shade of rich mountains profuse with huge spreading *chinars* by the side of murmuring streams, rich green verdures and in beautiful landscape, cut off from each other by the innumerable hillocks of the Valley, the earliest seeds of its folk music have grown and entered the very being of the nation.

For obvious political reasons this bounteous part of the world has generated in the poorest human beings an unusual endurance and fortitude. Its folk music has thus developed a predominant shriek the heave or sigh, which have either been reflected in a longing of love or portrayed in a mood plaintive, woeful and melancholic. Sometimes it has chosen to express helplessness and resignation to fate. But it has all along been orthodox and keen to retain its melody and shown a bias towards musical rhyme and ever-recurring refrains rich in its alliterations and assonances. Most of its typical lyrics, have however been brief, musically abounding in rhymes and assonances and have often been put in a woman's mouth as a cry from her heart.

Probably like all folk musics, Kashmiri folk music has a simple orchestra to accompany it. Generally *ghara* (pitcher) with *ghungarus* (bells), a *sarangi* (too crude to bear comparison with its Indian equivalent) a *tumbaknari* (an earthen drum) form its entire orchestra. Harmonium too has had its place, but is fast vanishing. The string instrument *rabab* has actually replaced it. All the instruments have a primitive element

in them. *Sarangi* which obviously forms the main accompaniment is termed as *saran* and is barely a foot-and-a-half in length, and a couple of inches in breadth. It has a very limited scope of *surs*. You can at best play the *surs* of one octave over it with a crude bow. But musically it is complete for its purpose as most folk tunes are composed on three notes generally from *madhyam* and often on a *bilwal atha*. The folk tunes of Kashmir can rightly be termed as *Trabendi* (Tra : three) and *Bendi* (of note).

Emphasis on Rhythm

The most outstanding feature of most of the types in *Chhakkri* is the deviation from the usual type of rhythm you find in Kashmiri folk music. The doubling of *laya* is done in a way which not only is simple and pleasing but has given Kashmiri folk music a style of its own.

Usually a young boy known as *bacha* used to form an integral part of this type of music. The *bacha* is a handsome musical 'voice' dressed as a lady who used to act the verses and engage the audience by some crude movements of dance while the orchestral interlude — *jawab* as they call it — followed. This can safely be explained from the Pathan rulers Kashmir had to cater to in the 18th century. But this practise is almost dead now especially after the recently political upheaval. In any case it has fallen from grace. Recently the inspiration of Kashmiri folk music has very properly been exploited and has served a great deal in contributing to the struggle of Kashmir. The results have been unexpectedly encouraging. The recent trends in Kashmiri poetry have also developed side by side with present-day folk music and are keeping pace with the changed environment.

M. L. Aima, a writer and critic has composed Kashmiri music for over 12 documentaries, some of them have won the President's Award. He has contributed music for 3 full-length films. Essentially a composer, he has written a number of articles on Music in general and Kashmiri music in particular and at present is working on a book entitled 'Sociology of Music' with reference to the Music of Kashmir, Tashkent, Iran, Afghanistan and North-Indian Music. He is also working as Adviser and Composer of Music in Afghan Radio System where he was sent on deputation by Ministry of I. & B. At present he is the Programme Executive (Production) T.V. Centre, A.I.R. New Delhi.